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## **ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION PRE-VISIT GUIDE**

Welcome to Angel Island. We look forward to your visit. These pre-visit materials were developed for you to use with your class to assist you in your visit to Angel Island Immigration Station. We have provided background information, suggested activities to do with your students to do before, during, and after your field trip, a glossary, and selected bibliography to help prepare for an enjoyable and educational visit.

### **Field Trip Basics**

School, community, and private groups can schedule visits to the Angel Island Immigration Station year round by contacting via email the Tour Desk Coordinator at: [tours.angelisland@parks.ca.gov](mailto:tours.angelisland@parks.ca.gov) or call [415-435-5537](tel:415-435-5537).

Space is limited and teachers are encouraged to reserve tours early in the school year. When scheduling please have the following information: a list of possible dates for your field trip, how many people in your group, and what boat your group is planning on taking.

Tours of the Immigration Station are led by park staff or volunteers and are approximately 1 hour in length. The site can accommodate 90 people (approximately 3 classes). School tour scheduling often depends on school and ferry schedules.

For school field trips: \$3 per student, teacher, and chaperons.

### **The Angel Island Immigration Station Site**

A few buildings remain from the Immigration Station site: a power plant, hospital, barracks, mule barn, and pump house. Visitors can explore the grounds on their own. The barracks, where the detainees lived at the Station, is the only building open for guided tours. There are restrooms, a drinking fountain, and picnic benches but no food service at the Angel Island Immigration Station site.

The barracks museum exhibits include information panels with historic photographs, artifact cases, and a recreation of the living quarters and interrogation hearing. The barracks walls are a unique historical resource. Immigrants carved hundreds of poems into the wooden walls of the barracks, expressing their sadness and isolation felt from the forced detention.

The weather on Angel Island can change quickly from warm and sunny to windy, cold, and foggy. Dressing in layers including a jacket is recommended.

### **Tours at Angel Island Immigration Station**

State Park staff will greet your group when you disembark from the ferry at Ayala Cove. They will give a brief orientation and direct your group to the path to the Immigration Station. The one-mile walk, includes 140 stairs and will take about 30-45 minutes. Bathrooms are located at the Cove or at the Immigration Station but not along the way. Upon arrival at the Immigration Station, State Park staff or volunteers will determine the order of the group tours for the day. Students might immediately start their tour or they might eat lunch and explore the site first. Groups can only enter the barracks when guided by park staff or volunteers; tours are approximately 1-hour long.

## **Historical Background—Angel Island Immigration Station**

From 1910 to 1940, the Immigration Station on Angel Island was used to process and detain hundreds of thousands of primarily Chinese and other Asian immigrants who entered America through San Francisco Bay. It was not a warm welcome. Upon a ship's arrival, immigration officials would separate the immigrants on board. Immigrants in first class with satisfactory paperwork would be allowed to disembark in San Francisco, while those remaining, mostly Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Indian, Portuguese, Mexican, and Russian immigrants were ferried to Angel Island. There, they would endure overcrowded facilities, humiliating medical examinations, intense interrogations, and countless days (sometimes months and even years) of waiting at the Immigration Station pending either approval of their applications or deportation.

For Chinese immigrants, who were the largest group processed, Angel Island was a harsh greeting to the United States, a reality far different from the vision they had of their new homeland called "Gold Mountain." Starting in the 1850s Chinese primarily left Guangdong Province in Southwest China to escape a cycle of poverty and chaos propelled by the Opium Wars, a deteriorating economy, a series of natural disasters, food shortages, and political unrest and violence. In the U.S. they hoped to find of wealth and fortune and worked in the railroad, agriculture and fishing industries, and by opening laundries and restaurants. However, economic depression in the 1870s raised anti-Chinese sentiment as white laborers and politicians blamed Chinese labor for California's economic woes. After increased violence and discrimination by anti-Chinese movements, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, banning all Chinese laborers into the country and severely restricting large-scale Chinese immigration.

In 1910 Immigration officials opened a new facility to house and process incoming and outgoing migrants on Angel Island, the largest island in the San Francisco Bay, far from the mainland. Replacing an old two-story shed at the wharf, the new station would prevent Chinese immigrants from communicating with those in San Francisco, isolate immigrants with communicable diseases, and, like the prison on nearby Alcatraz Island, be escape proof. Processing and questioning of new arrivals took weeks and sometimes months and years. Admittance was never assured. Because of the exclusionary laws directed specifically at them, some Chinese adopted false identities, becoming "paper sons or daughters"—either children of American citizens or the exempted merchant class on paper only. All entering Chinese had to prove their identity by matching details of their lives with the answers of their relatives in the United States. Inspectors had wide discretionary power in determining the fate of each applicant.

Angel Island is often referred to as the "Ellis Island of the West," yet the experiences of immigrants were quite different. The processing procedures on Ellis Island were romantically softened by the symbolic greeting by the Statue of Liberty and her message, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Angel Island offered no such comforts. In contrast, immigration officials considered the Immigration Station on Angel Island to be "the Guardian of the Western Gate." Immigrants endured harsh prison-like conditions while awaiting the demanding hearing process to prove their status as legal immigrants. They hoped to successfully negotiate the restrictive immigration laws, which attempted to exclude them from entry to the U.S. Thus, Angel Island and Ellis Island serve as bookends to the national story of immigration, not only in geography, but also in meaning and experience.

## **Poetry**

There are tens of thousands of poems  
    composed on these walls.  
They are all cries of complaint and sadness.  
The day I am rid of this prison and attain success,  
I must remember that this chapter once existed.  
In my daily needs, I must be frugal.  
Needless extravagance leads youth to ruin.  
All my compatriots should please be mindful.  
Once you have some real gains, return home early.  
    -By one from Xiangshan

For those who waited, loneliness, isolation, and despair colored their experience. Their chance at a new life hung in the balance. Immigrants etched poems into the walls of the dilapidated barracks serving as reminders of the anxiety, depression, fear, and hopes that the immigrants faced. Some poems include classical allegories and historical references and some were carved with a classical Cantonese technique. As first hand accounts, these poems take a special place in the history of the United States and American literature for illuminating the hardships that immigrants faced because of the exclusionary laws.



Detained in this wooden house for  
 several tens of days,  
 It is all because of the Mexican exclusion  
 law which implicates me.  
 It's a pity heroes have no way of  
 exercising their prowess.  
 I can only await the word so that I can snap Zu's whip.

From now on, I am departing far from this building  
 All of my fellow villagers are rejoicing with me.  
 Don't say that everything within is Western styled.  
 Even if it is built of jade, it has turned into a cage.  
 -- Poems from Angel Island Immigration Station,  
 author unknown

**PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES** -These activities are designed to prepare your students for a visit to the Angel Island Immigration Station.

**What is Immigration?**

Immigration is a part of most Americans’ family history. Why do families leave home for other countries. Have students identify some of the places that their families are from. Have students mark their family’s country of origin on a large map of the world with pushpins (you could use different colors for different decades). This information can then be used for graphing and percentage exercises as well as a jumping off point for researching what was occurring in the world that contributed to people’s moves.

**What is your home like?**

The conditions at the immigration station were very cramped. Detainees slept, ate, and played in rooms that were unfamiliar to them. Have students draw a floor plan of their homes and list the variety of activities that take place in these spaces. Encourage them to mark in features such as windows, and doors (this could become an exercise in measurements and scale). Have them add in furniture and modern conveniences like the TV or the refrigerator. Do they think the living area at the Immigration Station will be the same or different? In what way? *Save these drawings for comparison after the trip.* You may also point out to students immigrants had to recall what their home was like in their interview to enter the U.S. Share with students that Chinese immigrants could be sent back to where they came from if the inspectors felt that their answers did not match what their other family member said.

**Leaving Home**

Many immigrants came over in the crowded steerage section of a ship. Many were forced to leave their homelands without much notice. All had to leave many possessions behind. Ask your students to make a list of the things they would bring with them if they had to go and live in a new country. Tell them they can only bring what they can carry. (If possible have them bring a suitcase or bag of these objects to class). Ask them to explain why they chose these items.

## **ACTIVITIES DURING THE FERRY RIDE OR AT ANGEL ISLAND**

### **The Journey to America**

You may want to use your travel time to talk about how immigrants arrived by boat to America. How do students feel about being on the ferry? What do they think it would be like to be aboard a ship for three weeks crossing the Pacific Ocean? What do they think that would do during that time? What might immigrants be thinking as they first saw Angel Island?

### **Wildlife Observation & Conservation**

The San Francisco Bay and Angel Island is a rich source of wildlife. Have students notice and record the different plants and animals they see. Students should note that they should leave plants and animals, as they found them. Have students make drawings or take photos rather than taking samples home with them. Students can do further research on what they saw when they get back to the classroom. Students should also leave natural habitats cleaner than they found them. Have students pick up any refuse or debris they find and dispose of it properly so that the animals do not get to it.

### **Recording Your Journey**

Have your students spend time creating a record of their trip while on the island. Ask your students to take some time to draw some of the things they remember or liked best from their visit. Have students add text to the pictures to create their own “trip book,” a tangible recollection of their Island experience, or create a class collage using the students’ pictures.

**POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES** - These activities can be used to reinforce the trip experience and give your students an opportunity to process and express what they have learned

### **Poetry**

Writing is powerful voice for people of all backgrounds to express their experiences, hopes and fears. Have students create their own poetry based on their understanding of Angel Island Immigration Station. How does hearing about the immigrants make them feel? One possible poetry exercise is a found poem where students as individuals or groups can write down words, images, thoughts, and phrases that come to mind about the immigrants’ experiences. Phrases can even be taken from the Angel Island poems themselves. Then individually, in small groups, or as a whole class arrange these phrase into a poem that gets read to everyone.

### **Family History**

Immigration is a part of most Americans’ family history. Have students research how their family came to America by interviewing older family members, looking at documents at home, or even using the files at the National Archives Records Administration in San Bruno. How does the experience of Chinese immigrants entering this country through Angel Island compare to that of their families experiences? How is it different? Have them share their stories with other students in the classroom in a written, visual, or oral presentation.

### **Historic Preservation**

Historical sites can provide a connection among people, their place and their history. These are places where people have created stories, where they can find shared memories. Throughout the United States, individuals and community leaders have worked to preserve and conserve buildings, structures, and neighborhoods that reflect aspects of U.S. history and cultural heritage. Local residents, businesses, and city, state and/or national government agencies will often partner together to preserve buildings to recognize a historic past, instill community pride, and encourage economic revitalization. Discuss with students: What places in your community do you consider special? Are any of these places in danger of disappearing? What kind of preservation efforts have you seen in your community? Is there anything that you can do to preserve a building or a place?

### **Preservation: A Community Story**

The ongoing story of Angel Island Immigration Station includes the collective efforts of members of the larger community to preserve the site. In 1970 the California State Parks planned to destroy the barracks. Park Ranger, Alexander Weiss, rediscovered the poetry on the walls of the abandoned barracks and contacted Professor George Araki of San Francisco State College and photographer Mak Takahashi. Sparked by the discovery, Bay Area Asian Americans, spearheaded by Paul Chow, studied how best to preserve the station for historical interpretation. His organization later became the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF). Due to their efforts, California allocated money to restore and preserve the barracks as a state monument and in 1983, the barracks opened to the public. AIISF works as the non-profit partner of California State Parks and the National Park Service in the work to restore the historic immigration station at Angel Island. Due to AIISF's efforts in 1997, the Angel Island Immigration Station was declared a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. The immigration station still benefits from the efforts of volunteers in the community. Have students think about: What have they or their friends or family members have done to help other people in their community? Actions from people like themselves can make a difference. What are some issues in their community that they can work on?

### **Immigration and Detention Today**

Since the days of the operation of Angel Island Immigration Station, the U.S. has changed its immigration laws. In 1943 the U.S. repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act because of China's allegiance to the United States during World War II and instituted a quota system based on national origin restricting Chinese immigration to 105 persons annually. In the late 1960s, larger numbers of Chinese were allowed to immigrate as the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished these restrictive quotas based on race and nationality. Today, potential immigration is based on three entry categories: preference categories - family members, professionals, and needed skilled and unskilled labor; special immigrants - religious and medical personnel, and refugees - those seeking asylum from persecution or oppression in their own country.

After the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, U.S. state and federal officials applied new immigration measures out of concern for national security. Immigrants' civil liberties and the rights have been affected. Suspected illegal immigrants with links to terrorism have been detained as authorities traced thousands of leads and sought to prevent a follow-up attack, some facing delays in being charged or getting a lawyer, abuse and harsh conditions. Many people have been deported and though they have not been charged as terrorists. Civil rights groups have expressed their concerns about the broad net that the authorities have cast in prosecuting the campaign against terrorism are working to pressure the Justice Department to change its procedures.

Lead a discussion on immigration policies today. How do government policies today affect those who are immigrating and living in the United States? What are the some of the issues regarding immigration today, i.e. national security, granting asylum for political refugees, workers for industry, etc.? Have students do some research on current government immigration policies. How have they affected people in their community?

### **GLOSSARY**

**Chinese Exclusion Act** – A law passed in 1882 which suspended Chinese immigration to the United States and denying Chinese the right to become American citizens. It is the first restriction on immigration based on race and nationality, and stops large-scale Chinese immigration for 60 years.

**Citizenship** – When a person is a member of a country or nation, and is protected by its civil rights. Becoming a citizen in the Americas was a long and hard process for many Chinese immigrants.

**Discrimination** – When people are treated like they are different than everyone else. Chinese immigrants suffered form discrimination by being treated like they weren't as good as Caucasian citizens of the Americas.

**Immigrant** – A person who moves to and settles into a new country.

**Paper son** – Chinese immigrants adopted false identities in order to enter the country. A "paper son" is someone who became a son of a member of the exempt classes or an American citizen who were allowed to enter the country.

**Prejudice** – An intolerance or hatred of different people. Chinese people experienced prejudice in many different ways, such as being called names and not receiving fair wages for their work.

## SELECTED RESOURCES ABOUT THE ANGEL ISLAND IMMIGRATION STATION

### Books for Students & Teachers

Lee, Erika and Judy Yung. *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America*

In this landmark book commemorating the immigration station's 100th anniversary, Lee and Yung provides a sweeping yet personal history of Chinese "paper sons," Japanese picture brides, Korean refugee students, South Asian political activists, Russian and Jewish refugees, Mexican families, Filipino repatriates, and many others from around the world. Their experiences on Angel Island reveal how America's discriminatory immigration policies changed the lives of immigrants and transformed the nation.

Lai, Him Mark; Lim, Genny; and Yung, Judy (1980). *Island, Poetry and History of Immigrants Detained on Angel Island, 1910-1940*. San Francisco: HOC DOI. This book contains an overview of Immigration Station history, provides oral histories excerpts from former detainees, and documents the poetry in Chinese with English translations.

### Other Organizations and Resources for Immigration

Ellis Island Immigration Museum, <http://www.ellisland.org>

Ellis Island served as the East Coast immigration depot from 1892 until 1954. Restored and reopened in 1995, this national museum provides information on immigration.

National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), <http://www.nara.gov>

An independent Federal agency, the National Archives is America's national record keeper, to ensure ready access to the essential evidence that documents the rights of American citizens, the actions of Federal officials, & the national experience. Angel Island Immigration Station records are held in the Pacific Region San Bruno.

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR), <http://www.nnirr.org/>

This a national organization is composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists. It serves as a resource for important immigrant & refugee issues.

### About Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation

The Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF) is a non-profit organization founded by concerned citizens and descendants of detainees who were committed to preserving the deteriorating immigration station barracks. AIISF's primary goals are to lead the effort to preserve, restore, and interpret Angel Island Immigration Station, as the Pacific gateway for U.S. immigration; and to promote educational activities that further the understanding of Pacific Rim immigration in American history. For website information: [www.aiisf.org](http://www.aiisf.org).

### About California State Parks

California State Parks owns, operates and is the steward for all of Angel Island State Park. California State Parks operates the station though staffing for interpretive programs, managing the volunteer program, maintaining facilities and managing the use.